



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: MARCH 11, 2024

FROM: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WARD: 1
DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: PLANNING CASE DP-2024-01600 – REQUEST BY RIVERSIDE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION ON BEHALF OF ORANGE VALLEY MASONIC LODGE #13 TO DESIGNATE MERCANTILE HALL – ORANGE VALLEY MASONIC LODGE #13 - LOCATED AT 2931 TWELFTH STREET - AS A CITY LANDMARK AND AMEND THE ZONING CODE MAP TO APPLY THE CR – CULTURAL RESOURCE OVERLAY ZONE TO THE SUBJECT PROPERTY

ISSUE:

Adopt a Resolution to designate the Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13, located at 2931 Twelfth Street, as a City Landmark and adopt an Ordinance amending the Zoning Code Map to apply the CR - Cultural Resources Overlay Zone to the subject property.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. **DETERMINE** that Planning Case DP-2024-01600 (Historic Designation), to designate the Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13 as a City Landmark, is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption) and 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment), as the proposal will have no significant effect on the environment, identifies the structure as a cultural resource, and preserves the historic character of a cultural resource;
2. **APPROVE** Planning Case DP-2024-01600 (Historic Designation) based on, and subject to, the Cultural Heritage Board facts for findings outlined in the attached Cultural Heritage Board staff report;
3. **ADOPT** the attached Resolution designating the Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13 as a City Landmark;
4. **APPROVE** the attached findings for the Zoning Code Map Amendment to apply the CR — Cultural Resources Overlay Zone to the subject property; and

5. **INTRODUCE, AND SUBSEQUENTLY ADOPT**, the attached Ordinance to rezone 2931 Twelfth Street from the R-1-7000-Single Family Residential Zone to the R-1-7000-CR – Single Family Residential and Cultural Resources Overlay Zones.

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS:

On January 15, 2025, the Cultural Heritage Board (CHB) unanimously voted (6 ayes and 0 noes) to recommend that the City Council approve Planning Case DP-2024-01600 and designate the Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge as a City Landmark (Attachments 4 and 5).

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

A “Landmark” is defined in Section 20.50.010 of Title 20 of the Riverside Municipal Code as:

- A. Any improvement or natural feature that is an exceptional example of a historical, archaeological, cultural, architectural, community, aesthetic or artistic heritage of the City, retains a high degree of integrity; and
- B. meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - 1. Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, architectural, or natural history;
 - 2. Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history;
 - 3. Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction, or is a valuable example of the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship;
 - 4. Represents the work of a notable builder, designer, or architect, or important creative individual;
 - 5. Embodies elements that possess high artistic values or represents a significant structural or architectural achievement or innovation;
 - 6. Reflects significant geographical patterns, including those associated with different eras of settlement and growth, particular transportation modes, or distinctive examples of park or community planning, or cultural landscape;
 - 7. Is one of the last remaining examples in the City, region, State, or nation possessing distinguishing characteristics of an architectural or historical type or specimen; or
 - 8. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

DISCUSSION:

The Riverside Housing Development Corporation, on behalf of the property owner, is requesting approval of a Historic Designation request to designate Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13 as a City Landmark.

Mercantile Hall was built by David Stokes along with other black investors and opened in 1905. David Stokes and Aaron Wiley ran the Stokes and Wiley Grocery Store on the first floor along with an ice cream/sweet shop run by Will Goodwin, and the second floor was used for a multi-purpose gathering space. According to The Colored Citizen newspaper, “This was the biggest

enterprise undertaken by the colored people of Riverside.”

Also in 1905, the Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13, of which David Stokes was a member, was established due to restriction that prevented African Americans from joining Caucasian fraternal organizations and social clubs. By the 1950s, the building’s primary use and owner was the Masonic Lodge.

The building also served as a multipurpose building for the Eastside African- and Mexican American communities. In 1931, the African American community met at Mercantile Hall to raise funds for the defense of the Scottsboro boys, nine African American male teenagers wrongfully accused of raping two white women in Tennessee. Additionally, the building became a “Freedom School” along with churches and homes in 1965 during the boycott of de facto segregation in Eastside public schools (Lowell, Irving, and Casa Blanca) after the burning of Lowell School.

As part of the City of Riverside African American Civil Rights Movement Historic Context Statement (1870-1976) complete in 2022, Mercantile Hall was found eligible for listing in National Register and California Register criterion A/1 for serving as a place of continuous work in economic nationalism, labor issues, and civil planning over decades before, through, and after the Civil Rights Movement. The building was also found eligible under Criterion B/2 for its association with David Stokes and Aaron Wiley who were significant in Riverside's African-American history under themes of Education, Employment & Entrepreneurship, and Social Groups, Organizations & Formalized Resistance.

Therefore, the social hall is eligible for designation under City Landmark Criterion 1 as it showcases the establishment of gather spaces and business to serve Riverside’s African American community and their fight for civil right. The social hall is also eligible for designation under Criterion 2 for its association with David Stokes and Aaron Wiley, prominent members of the Riverside's African American community. Despite alteration, the Mercantile Hall – Orange Valley Masonic Lodge #13 still retains a high-degree integrity required for City Landmark designation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Prior to the CHB and City Council meetings, public notices were mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the site.

As of the writing of this report, no responses have been received by staff regarding this historic designation request.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This item contributes to the Envision Riverside 2025 City Council Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well-Being (Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide).

This item aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Community Trust** - This Landmark Designation request is being reviewed during a Public Hearing before the City Council and the public is able to provide comments.
2. **Equity** - Historic property information associated with this designation will be added to the City’s Historic Resources Inventory, which will be available to the public. This will

allow information about the historic property to be available to all residents

3. **Fiscal Responsibility** - No City General Funds are being allocated as part of this Landmark Designation.
4. **Innovation** - This Landmark Designation request made use of current research practices and looks at historic integrity based on best practices approaches.
5. **Sustainability and Resiliency** - This Landmark Designation will help to preserve the City's collective history for future generations.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact resulting from the City Landmark designation.

Prepared by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Approved by: Jennifer A. Lilley, Community & Economic Development Director
Certified as to
availability of funds: Kristie Thomas, Assistant Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer
Approved by: Mike Futrell, City Manager
Approved as to form: Jack Liu, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Resolution for Historic Designation
2. Recommended Findings for CR Overlay Zone
3. Ordinance
4. Cultural Heritage Board Staff Report – January 15, 2025
5. Cultural Heritage Board Draft Minutes – January 15, 2025
6. Presentation